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Two Letters from the Holy Land

(Editor's Note: The following two letters first appeared in the Israeli fanzine 'War of Words', No 5, November, 1996. The author of the response to Yosi Sarid's-Knesset member and head of "Meretz party- appeal to 12th graders to enter the IDF [Israeli Defense Force] which appeared in 'Yediot Akhronot', the largest circulation newspaper in Israel, was Santiago Gomez. Given the present seemingly insurmountable impasse between the Sharon administration and the Palestinian Authority, we find Gomez's response thought-provoking and challenging in its wisdom applied to an agonizing problem facing young people throughout the world community. It is wholly consistent with the one world and one humanity viewpoint. Do we have a budding, latter-day prophet in the "Holy Land"?)

In "A Letter to 12th Graders," Yosi Sarid:

In the end of the school year that is starting now, you are about to conscript to IDF. I'm allowing myself to turn to you in a request to be ready for a contributive and useful military service in which there is readiness for investment and a full use of your skills.

I know all the reasons that may bring you to a trouble in making decision, and out of it- to a wrong conclusion. I know the reasons, as I said, but I don't accept them. Some say that Peace is already at our door and so there's no need for the same measure of volunteering as in the past, and some say, that the new government is leaving the way-of-peace and may bring a war on us, and there's no will to serve under such a government,. And some say that the evasion of the ultra-orthodox is too much, and no one is their sucker, that will go and volunteer and be in danger of them, while they are celebrating on our money, and deciding there in the government upon our fate.

All these claims, however heavy and justifiable they may be, doesn't justify "small-head" and "close-to-home" or "profile 210" (a complete release from military service due to permanent health problems) Government comes and government goes, and the country (literally "state") always remains, and our country is still threatened, and the country is you. And the country is the life of you and your friends.

A strong army is still, regretfully, forced by reality (maybe now more than ever)., and even anyone who has strong and right criticism over the policy, shouldn't confuse between the policy and the country, which is always we, which is always ours, in good and in bad. This country is our land, our homeland, our home, and it's too important to us that we will leave the military service alone and give it to others. It is not right to do; it is not wise; it is not responsible and it's not even fair.

It's very important that people with values, who obey only their commanders and their personal conscience, will make the tune in IDF, because the tune makes the music, and the music in the army makes the march.

If our army will be weakened, if it will not feel self confident, it will also not inspire security, With an embarrassed IDF, which spreads embarrassment,, it will be more difficult to make peace, because making peace is always accompanied with making compromises and only the strong is able

and allowed to compromise.

Now they start a committee, another committee, to check the "decreasing of motivation." You don't need this committee to know the true reasons for the decreasing of motivation and the ways to raise it anew, You know yourselves and your friends better than any committee in the world, even better than the Prime Minister and the Minister of Security together, and who except you can prove that even out of feeling of criticism and frustration, of repulsiveness and bad feeling, there's enough responsibility in you to fulfill a duty. No one will raise your moral nor your motivation- only you will raise and go up, if you want.

I thank you for your attention.

Yours,
Yosi Sarid

Santiago Gomez's response (translated from the Hebrew)

Hello Mr. Sarid:

I have read your letter to 12 graders, and I couldn't fail to answer.

I managed to read beyond your clean language, beyond your "father's advise" language, far beyond the enlightened, nice appearance that you show. And I didn't like what I saw. Your message is too simple: mobilize in the army. That's all - two words. But the view behind them - however common here in Israel - is one of the most terrible and hateful views toward human beings, their liberty, and their basic right to live.

Mr. Sarid, you may be seen in your letter as the left winger humanist who already has a monopoly on conscience, and thus the ability to "judge" our morality, our claims. Please, Mr. Sarid, let me know what is your real motivation when you declare that you already know all our doubts and fears, because I don't believe you're interested in our good, and because I have the feeling that you're doing it so you could, actually think and decide instead of us, from an 'authoritative' position, to eliminate those doubts and fears before they grow, and to do it out of so-called 'empathy' and "understanding," without showing the fact that your concern is actually for the 'national interest.' Do you know what is the definition of a "Fascist," Mr. Sarid? A Fascist is a man who thinks that the citizen should serve the state and not the opposite; that the state is more important than man is. I would like to hear from you where do you stand according to this definition?

But before you answer, I have a small mission for you that can help you decide: stand and say before all your friends in the Knesset, in front of the television cameras, aloud and convincingly, that every man's life - every man's- is more important than the state. Please say that the life of the rag-wearied beggar, of the incurable patient grounded to his bed, of the poor and foreign worker, of the prisoner in his cell - that the life of every person you see on the street, of any anonymous stranger, are more important than the State of Israel, That the flag is nothing compared to them. That the value of Zionism is a small comma compared to their value., And I want you to say that about me as well, about my life. I want you to say that my life is a million times more important than the State, its institutions, than its papers, than its laws. That we all are "above the law." Can you say that honestly, without hesitation or stuttering. No, I didn't think you could.

Mr. Sarid, you are a Fascist, perhaps not out of ideology. Perhaps just out of stupidity, confusion or a narrow mind - but, you're still a Fascist.

One moment, wait, don't hurry to defend yourself yet, since I know what you're about to say. You're about to claim that in your eyes, the IDF soldiers protect their lives and the lives of other humans

and not necessarily the State, as a separate thing. I'm sorry, Mr. Sarid, but this claim sounds to me, in a devalued language, ridiculous.

If, as you say, the State is we, then why instead of telling people "defend yourselves, the humans" you're declaring that it's needed to "defend the State"? And why, instead of telling the young that "their life is in danger," you prefer using a sentence like "Our State is still threatened"? And tell me why, if, as you say, "the State is you," you don't trust her and you don't trust him that their natural, free life instinct will raise them to defend themselves and their lives, and instead of that you're calling them to defend an abstraction, an organization, the social concept called "state"?

And let me remind you, Mr Sarid, that in contradiction with the "advising father" image you created for yourself, you're not only "calling" or "advising" them to do that - you are an active member and a partner in a governmental staff that obligates them, according to law and under the threat of arrest, to defend this "State." Explain to me why you force these young - and along them myself as well - to defend themselves only through "the defense of the State," to defend themselves only indirectly, through you, through your organization, your planning, and your commanding. Who benefits from this going around?" Is it possible that the state - which you and you friends, the ministers and the Knesset members are heading - is the one that feeds and gets strong on it? Is it possible that this is what you're actually interested in and not the protection of human life? Is it possible that the will to power is causing you to take our lives, the real ones, which are the most precious thing we have, and that we could not live them again - and use them for "humaning", a fiction that is call "a state"?

If it isn't so, then why do you force military service by law? Aren't you aware of the simple fact which every child knows, that people whose life is in danger defend themselves out of their free will and without any need to force them? Or maybe you just don't trust the young correct thinking. It's an instinct, Mr. Sarid, 'the instinct of survival,' and it's present in everyone of us, including 12 graders.

The truth is that you, as a politician, are interested in creating a society where the government will have, always and in any time, obedient citizens who will be ready (in the name of democracy) to execute any policy that will be decided by the government. You may hide it under the cover of idealism, but the true reason for you appealing to the youth and calling them to mobilize and to ignore the current government's policy is not your respect for democracy, not your "fair game" approach, not your political politeness and not your political integrity, This call of yours is coming out of a cold calculation, not out of the knowledge that one day you may be in the government too and on that day you - the same like the present government- will breed 'cannon meat' slaves, with full obedience to their government. The right wing is much too stupid to use the sophistication of your methods, much too self confident,, so it calls for obedience under its government and to rejection and rebellion under left governments. You, Mr Sarid, are smarter than they, less hotheaded, more "civilized" - but no less a Fascist.

The facts are clear: when both the state and both the humans inside it are endangered, you are willing to sacrifice the humans for the existence of the state and not the opposite, and this in spite of the fact that the state is a fiction, a concept, it's nothing perceptible.

A "state" is just a headline, a name for a group of humans organized in a certain way: in form of "a state."

You may think it's the most efficient way, that if you left us, 12 graders and other young, to organize themselves in order to protect their lives and their land, out of law's and army's framework, there would be a great chaos, or that it is totally unrealistic, and so you use nation, state and army to unite and to organize us. It could be. But here, this is another difference between you and me, Mr. Sarid,

because those things I see as vital, efficient, and the best and even necessary for all the population - I am in no way willing to force them on the rest of the humans, I don't think it's moral to force on the citizens of Israel by police, courts, "education," fines, laws and prisons, Truth, Justice or efficiency as I see them, Because one who does this, no matter what are his intentions or what is his world view, is a dictator and not a humanist if using your words, "It is not right to do, it is not wise, it is not responsible, and it's not even fair."

Maybe you don't understand at all how it is possible to do the opposite, that is, how it is possible to sacrifice the state to save its citizens. If so, let me explain it to you:

The state, as I told you several times, is not an existent thing that you could see; its borders are not a perceptible thing that you could touch. The state hasn't a 'personality' that can 'demand' things from you or to be under 'threat.' There are only officials that pretend to represent it, or citizens that pretend to obey it. And this is actually both its existence, both the reason for its existence and both the plane on which it exists. Actually, what exists in reality is only "the belief in the state."

Humans, on the other side, like you and me, are flesh and blood; they exist. We, not like the state, are a real thing. The inhabitants of the State of Israel and the State of Israel itself exist in different dimensions, in the two most far poles of human perception: reality and imagination.

The way to actually execute the belief that human being and their lives are more important than the state, or in other words, the way to "sacrifice the state for the salvation of its citizens," the only true Anti-Fascism- is estrangement from the belief in the state. Simply that. The "sacrifice" is done on the perceptual plane, on which only there the state exists, and there's no need to destroy or to break anything actually.

Your call for 12th graders to mobilize for the state's sake, your contempt towards "small head," "close to home," and "profile 21" means that it's a duty for the young to be in danger and even to die - in time of need or cause - for the state's sake and even though you're surely not happy with this version of your sayings, it's precise at a hundred percent.

Your "moral" is the sacrifice of human beings, of their lives, for a thing that is even not non- living, but non-existent; a thing which, ironically, the only justification for its existence is that it's supposed to save lives! This position strengthens, of course, the belief in the state the same way it's coming out of it: it advances the belief in the state and (rejects) the belief in human beings,

The State of Israel, like the rest of the states in the world, was established thanks to violence; they are its result. Whether it was the aggression of tribes, kings and emperors (Europe) war of independence (USA), or voyages of conquest and enslavement (Third World states) - violence always had a major role in their establishment, The State of Israel is no different. It was established in a violent struggle, in organized violence of terrorist groups ("freedom fighters," perhaps?) against the British,, Palestinians and Arabs, and later on in war too. Except from being the result of violence, states create violence as well, every day - they strengthen and perpetuate it. In this issue Israel is not different as well. The threat you talk about, Mr. Sarid, the same threat hanging now over the State of Israel, the same threat that requires the mobilization of young, the "strong army" - what is it actually? It seems strange to me that you don't mention it, its reasons, its character or the origin of its creation.

The state created this threat, this problem, Mr. Sarid, and so it can't be the solution., The State of Israel, the State of Jordan, the State of Syria, the State of Iran - not one state created this problem but the mere idea of a "state." The direction (that you support with enthusiasm) to divide all human beings in the world instead of uniting them, the belief that the state is "we". Its "ours". And it's "our

home", if I quote you.

The only reason that in this moment there are people, who I never met and they never met me, who are conspiring in secret basements, and apartments to plan terrorist acts and methods to murder me, personally, and the rest of the people who live here, is because you forced is to represent something which is actually yours and you force us to be responsible for the 'actions' of something that existed before we were born and that we don't have real control over its actions. The problem, the threat is aimed at this thing, at 'the state', and all your goal and the goal of your friends in the Israeli politics is the creation of total identification between us and it ("the State is always we"), turning real human beings into a fiction, demography, statistics, in order to create a human defense wall for the power, the domination and the way in which you choose to act. And of course one of the most efficient ways to turn us into "the State of Israel" - is to put our lives too under threat- is to encourage is to mobilize to the IDF with propaganda that goes from the kindergarten to the mass media - and includes such "letters" as yours.

On the the side of the state's border fence there are people who want to murder me because they were too, like myself, brainwashed by people like you, who created parallelism between human life and states - only in their case the brainwash worked, (while) I refuse to believe you and listen to your 'advises'.

Your call for the youth to mobilize is, both historically and humanly, disconnected from its real context. And I would like to return it to its original context by a small example:

Think about a man who goes, stupidly, to wash in a river where there are whirlpools and very strong dragging streams, After he entered the water, and already got stuck in whirlpools and streams as well, he tries, of course, to preserve body stability and control so he could keep his head above the water. But this stability will not help him to survive the river's steams, because sooner or later, his body will be weakened and he will drown. Even a small amount of air in his lungs is not the solution because very soon it will end, and actually, his only solution is trying to get to the river's bank in order to exit the water.

The State of Israel, like this man, is in a deadly whirlpool from which we all are trying to be saved. Like that man, Israel, it also could be said, shouldn't have gone into this whirlpool, and that its entrance was the mistake which brought upon us the danger and the threat we face today. This, of course, is a very right thing to say, but this isn't the solution, because the wheel can't be brought back.

The solution that you show in your letter to 12 graders, Mr. Sarid, the mobilization to IDF, is the drowning man's attempt to stabilize his body, The same way this man sometimes manages to avoid one stream or another whirlpool - so does a "strong army" manages sometimes to stop one terrorist or to prevent another act of terror. But it can't be done forever since our "body" will also be weakened, the air in our lungs will run out, and this is actually not a solution at all. Even your "peace process" will not solve the problem because according to you, during it and even after its conclusion we will need a "strong army" perhaps even more than in the past, in order to "inspire security."

The real solution is trying to reach the bank, to get out of the river. The problem is that you, as most people, cancel the will to "get out of the river" as dreamy, as utopian, as non-realistic. And even though we're slowly being weakened, air is running out, and we're about to drown - you won't admit your mistake.

In order for the drowning man to understand that his only way out is the land on the river's bank, he

should first understand that he made a mistake, and he shouldn't have gone into the stormy river in the first place. If he won't understand that, he won't have the will to be saved at all. The same way you, Mr. Sarid, should abandon your mistake, your belief in states, armies, nations, and the rest of whirlpools drowning today's humanity and the State of Israel. This is the first step (which I doubt you could do at all.)

In order to be saved and to reach that river's bank, there's no need that all the humans will smile and suddenly become nice. There's no need that all the weapons in the world will turn into flowers, and there's no need even for a strong revolutionary uprising that will overthrow the current order. It is only needed that you, yourself, will understand and admit your mistake, and that you will have the will to be saved. From there, the way to get to the secured shore may be shorter and simpler than you think.

But the preservation of body stability, though not a solution in itself, is still a necessary condition for being saved from drowning, and you must ask yourself why, if I admit that IDF is, in the existing reality, like an attempt to stabilize the body, "forced by reality," I'm not joining it.

The answer is that., in my opinion, IDF is just a failing attempt. It is the worst way of "stabilizing" the social "body." since it is not aware of itself, of its real context and of the fact that it is not a true solution. I, Mr. Sarid, am working in my own way to keep our head above the water, and I think that even though I'm not involved in the actual capture of terrorist acts' comitters or the collecting of intelligence information for the army - I work for the good of society, and the damage I cause to human beings is much smaller than the damage of the IDF's heros.

Your way, your "Letter to 12 graders." is a defeatist attempt that only promotes the drowning and death of us all, and my attempts - like this issue of "War on Words" are positive , real attempts, without forcing lawmaking, propagandistic.manipulation or political interests Only to my regret my words reach must less people than your letter in "Yediot Akhronot."

I thank you for your attention.

Yours hopefully that the motivation to serve to IDF will keep going down.

S. Anti-Ego
(Aka Santiago Gomez)